

Agenda Item	17
Report No	HC/25/23

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Highland Council

Date: 29 June 2023

Report Title: Members' Learning and Development Programme

Report By: Interim Chief Executive

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 The following report provides an update on the development of the refreshed Learning and Development Programme for Elected Members. It was agreed at the last Council meeting on 11 May 2023, that a Short Life Members' Working Group would be established to scope future requirements, with a view to bringing back an updated Learning and Development Programme for Council approval. The Terms of Reference for the Group are attached at **Appendix 1**.

This report draws on the Group's early discussions and builds on the findings of the recent Members' Survey and engagement with the Improvement Service.

- 1.2 The Elected Members' Learning and Development Programme is intended to equip all Members with the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their role, from induction for newly elected Members through to continued professional development throughout the term of office including workshops and webinars on topical issues. The desired outcome is to provide a quality and engaging Learning and Development Programme that is regularly evaluated to deliver continual improvement, thus enabling Councillors to be effective in their role.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the establishment of the Short Life Members' Working Group;
- ii. Agree the Terms of Reference of the Working Group (Appendix 1);
- iii. Agree to hold a Members' workshop in August 2023 to provide Members with the opportunity to shape the refreshed Learning and Development Programme;
- iii. Note the next steps with the view of presenting a refreshed Learning and Development Programme for Council approval in October 2023.

3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource** Staff resource will be required to develop and deliver the Learning and Development Programme. It will require dedicated staff time and input from a range of Council Services, including People Development, Member Support Services, Legal, Communications and the Executive Support Team. This will ensure there is a coordinated approach in the delivery of the Programme and that it remains aligned with Councillor requirements and priorities.

There will also be a time commitment asked of Members of the Working Group, which will include working with officers to develop and implement a Learning and Development Programme focusing on Members' needs and effective learning outcomes.

- 3.2 **Legal** There are no direct legal implications arising from the report. There are specific requirements for Members appointed to the Licensing Board and for those who are involved in the determination of planning applications to undertake mandatory training to fulfil regulatory functions and obligations.
- 3.3 **Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)** The refreshed Learning and Development Programme will be screened to ensure there are no adverse equalities impacts.
- 3.4 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever** There are no direct implications arising from the proposals in this report. However, there is a need for Carbon Literacy Training to be rolled out as part of the Learning and Development Programme.
- 3.5 **Risk (including Health & Safety risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process or people)** A failure to follow appropriate governance and scrutiny in making decisions at committee and council presents potentially significant legal, financial, and reputational risks for the Council. The Learning and Development Programme seeks to mitigate these risks. There are no Health and Safety implications arising as a direct result of this report, but there will be Health and Safety training opportunities provided under the refreshed programme.
- 3.6 **Gaelic** There are no direct implications for the Gaelic, however, the Learning and Development Programme will provide opportunities to raise awareness of the Gaelic language and to acquire Gaelic language skills, to align with the Council's Gaelic Language Plan.

4. Short Life Members' Working Group and Emerging Themes

- 4.1 Following Council on the 11 May 2023, the Short Life Members' Working Group was established with its first meeting held on 6 June 2023. It was agreed at Council that membership of the Group would be open to all Members with an interest, rather than on the basis of political balance. There are a further two meetings planned for early August and September. The draft Terms of Reference for the Members' Working Group are attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 4.2 Key themes emerging from initial discussions included strengthening Members' understanding of their governance and scrutiny role. This aligns with the feedback from the Members' survey and will be considered as one of the key areas for the Programme. The work being undertaken by the recently established Governance Steering Group will dovetail with the Highland Council's future offering in terms of governance and scrutiny training.

- 4.3 The Group also identified the need for ongoing learning and development on Local Government Finance and Budgeting. As part of the Highland Council's induction programme for Elected Members, learning and development is offered around Local Government Finance. The refreshed Learning and Development Programme will make provisions to ensure that financial management training is refreshed and provided to Members on an annual basis.
- 4.4 The Group also identified the following areas as key priorities:
- Improving communications around Members' Learning and Development;
 - A consistent approach to administering future Learning and Development opportunities;
 - A focus on Members' needs to align with Council priorities;
 - A streamlined programme focusing on priority areas for learning and development that is proportionate.
- 4.5 The Council previously approved a Learning and Development Programme for Elected Member's in 2019 ([Link](#)). This was based on the voluntary CPD self-assessment model designed by the Improvement Service, which set out 10 competencies, underpinned by 55 behaviours. Discussions with the Members of the Working Group concluded that the refreshed Learning and Development Programme needed to be more streamlined than originally proposed and aligned to the needs of Members.
- 4.5 The Improvement Service have since moved away from the earlier model and have introduced the voluntary Political Skills Assessment. This has been designed to form part of a structured process that Councils can use to put in place appropriate elected Member development arrangements. This model is currently being rolled out across all 32 Local Authorities. It covers six key areas (outlined under 5.1) which will be considered as part of the design of the Learning and Development Programme.

5. The Refreshed Learning and Development Programme

- 5.1 The Learning and Development Programme for Members will be based on two guiding principles introduced by the Improvement Service which are to **Learn** and **Lead** and will focus on the following approaches for delivering Members' learning and development:
- Briefings and Webinars on topical issues
 - Guidance Notes for Members on key areas of work
 - Mentoring Scheme and Coaching for Elected Members
 - Subject specific training courses
 - Bespoke/tailored on request support

Together with a number of 'core' training areas (finance; scrutiny; equalities and diversity; Data Protection etc) there will be Learning and Development opportunities developed in line with the revised Political Awareness Assessment model designed by the Improvement Service, this includes the following six themes:

1. Community Leadership
2. Strategy & Policy Development
3. Decision-making
4. Scrutiny
5. Partnership Working

6. Regulator

- 5.2 The Highland Council's own online learning portal (Traineasy) was rolled out to Members some time ago and replaced the previous portal (My Online Learning). During discussions with the Short Life Members' Working Group gaps were identified in terms of reporting, availability of online learning and communications. Work is being undertaken to address this which will include a full assessment of the existing online learning and development provision.
- 5.3 The Learning and Development Programme will be developed by the Short Life Members' Working Group with input from corporate teams across Council, and engagement with the Improvement Service and other Local Authorities.

6. Measuring Learning and Development Effectiveness

- 6.1 A review of the Programme is planned for Spring 2024 to ensure that it is an effective tool for Elected Members' learning and development. There will also be feedback forms provided following individual training courses to ensure that opportunities are taken to improve the content and delivery of the Programme as it is rolled out.
- 6.2 A further meeting of the Short Life Members' Working Group be convened in early April 2024 to agree the opportunities for adjustment and improvement, with the view of taking a progress report to Council in May 2024.
- 6.3 The Members' Annual Survey will also be reviewed as part of the refreshed Learning and Development Programme. Further consideration needs to be given to the number of areas covered within the existing survey. Discussions with the Members' Working Group concluded that shorter survey's focusing on fewer areas may help to increase participation and reduce pressures on Members' time.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 A draft Learning and Development Programme will be presented to the Short Life Members' Working Group at its meeting in early August, with a further meeting planned for September to finalise the Programme before presenting to Council for approval in October 2023.

Designation: Interim Chief Executive

Date: 29 June 2023

Author: Shelley Rennie, Business Manager

Short Life Members' Working Group
Learning and Development Programme
Terms of Reference (ToR)

Purpose:

It was agreed at Council on 11 May 2023 that a Short Life Working Group be established to inform the Members' Learning and Development Programme for 2023-2024.

The Members' Short Life Working Group aims to develop a refreshed Learning and Development Programme which includes reviewing the short, medium, and longer-term needs of Elected Councillors.

Membership:

Membership of the group is open to all elected Members and the current Membership is outlined below:

Councillor, Chris Balance
Councillor, Callum Munro
Councillor, Christopher Birt
Councillor, Sarah Atkin
Councillor, Jaqueline Hendry
Councillor, Alex Graham
Councillor, Kate Willis

Officer support is provided by:
Paul Nevin, ECO Performance & Governance,
Shelley Rennie, Business Manager,
Nicky MacLennan, People Development Manager

Accountability:

It will be the responsibility of Officers to report back to Council in terms of progress, implementation, and delivery of the Members' Learning and Development Programme.

Review:

The first meeting of this group was held on 6 June 2023. Thereafter, the group will meet once in August and again in September. Following the work of the Group, approval will be sought on the implementation of the Members' Learning and Development Programme within a six-month period.

Ways of Working

All meetings will be held via Microsoft Teams, thus supporting a flexible approach as well as reducing Member/Officer time and travel. Agendas and papers will be circulated one week in advance of meetings of the Group. Action Notes will be produced and circulated following each meeting.